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THE MODERN

DISCIPLES OF REMBRANDT

A SKETCH OF CONTEMPORARY ETCHING

REPRINTED BY PERMISSION FROM THE "ART REVIEW"

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A CHAPTER OF AN ELEMENTARY CHARACTER ENTITLED

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NOTE: To any readers who may not already be conversant with the subject, the author ventures to suggest that they might do well to first read the chapter entitled "What Etchings Are," and afterward "The Modern Disciples of Rembrandt."

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SEYMOUR HADEN

PHOTOGRAVURE CO. N.Y.

Shere Mill Pond

[*Reproduced in reduced size from the original Etching*]

THE MODERN DISCIPLES OF REMBRANDT

REMBRANDT, who was born in Holland in 1606 and died there in 1665, may be regarded as the great representative etcher for all time. He did not originate the process; but, having found it in a crude and undeveloped state, he carried it to a height of perfection which, as a whole, has never since been equaled.

Notwithstanding all the achievements of the modern school in the various details of etching, such as dry-point, management of the aqua-fortis, methods of printing, and so forth, it is probably true that every one of these refinements of the art was known and practiced by Rembrandt himself. He knew well how to vary effects by different styles of printing, was well acquainted with the virtues of Japanese and vergé papers, and on rare occasions he even printed proofs on satin.

From the etchers' point of view all that this great master produced was so *right*, that now, after the lapse of two centuries, there is probably no etcher living who would not be proud to call himself a "Disciple of Rembrandt." Etching is such a many-sided process that it seems to yield an inexhaustible variety of effects; but to illustrate how truly Rembrandt "being dead, yet speaketh," a remarkable experience of the present writer may be related. Years ago, when traveling through continental Europe, it was his habit to carry with him a selection of the etchings of Seymour Haden. When these were shown, for the first time, to some artist or amateur, the comment usually was: "School of Rembrandt." And in later years, after our own American etchers began to produce such fine work, the general remark of these same experts, on seeing some specimens of it, was: "School of Seymour Haden."

After the death of Rembrandt, etching seems, in a great measure, to have declined from its legitimate uses, until it became a mere adjunct to line engraving, the engraver using it for the coarser preliminary work of his plate before finishing with the burin. Many plates were also produced entirely by the etching process; but, as the etched line was made to imitate as closely as possible the formal and rigid appearance of the engraved line, the result was a coarse and inferior substitute for line engraving. Etching could never, however, achieve the mathematical precision of the burin any more than the burin could give the free and spirited touch of the etching-needle; and it seems to have been forgotten that this seeming defect was in reality its greatest charm.

A curious instance of this blindness to the artistic charm of the free and frank work of the painter-etcher is seen in the *Iconography* of Van Dyck. This great master etched

a series of portraits of contemporary artists. He did his work with the greatest economy of labor, but in a superb style. These plates were then (presumably with the consent of Van Dyck) handed over to such excellent engravers as Bolswert, Suyderhoef, and Vorsterman, who finished them with the burin. But before they were thus finished, a few proofs of the pure etchings were taken. And now, after the lapse of two centuries, it has happened to the writer to purchase one of these portraits in both states—namely, the unfinished etching as Van Dyck left it, and the same with the engraver's work superadded; but he paid just fourteen hundred times as much for the "unfinished" as for the "finished" print!

This, of course, is an extreme case, and does not demonstrate that all etching is precious and all engraving worthless. Such attempts have been made; but no amount of argument can disprove the fact that all art lovers owe a debt of gratitude to the engravers in line and mezzotint, who have done noble work in the past and who have preserved to the world many masterpieces of which the originals have perished. The likelihood is that in the future the etching-needle will supersede the burin; but this cannot invalidate the value of the older engravings, and the two sister arts should be regarded as being friends, not enemies.

While Rembrandt, Van Dyck, and some others were working in the Netherlands, their great contemporary, Claude Lorrain, was painting or etching his beautiful classical landscapes in France and Italy. As an etcher, he was somewhat unequal, but a few of his best plates have never been surpassed for tenderness and beauty. Claude's acknowledged masterpiece is the plate entitled *Le Bouvier*,— of which a reproduction, in the original size, is appended.

Perhaps the most important event in the history of etching is the wonderful revival of the art which took place toward the middle of the present century. Etching had degenerated from its true principles as exemplified by Rembrandt, until it sunk into a coarse and easy substitute for line engraving, instead of remaining as free and untrammeled as the clouds in a summer sky, when a few thoughtful artists in France and England awoke to the conviction that it was an art apart, and with a language of its own. For this revival we are chiefly indebted to the French school, although, before the general movement had commenced in France, at least one British artist, Sir David Wilkie, had, as early as 1825, produced both etching and dry-point work of the right sort.

Charles Jacque began to etch in the year 1830, and although few artists are better known through their paintings, yet this veteran has found time during the last sixty years to produce nearly five hundred plates, and of these his latest are perhaps his best. Another of the surviving pioneers is Léopold Flameng. It is not without warrant that the great contemporary school of reproductive etching is known as the "School of Léopold Flameng." Commencing his career as a line engraver, he soon discarded the laborious exactitude of the graver for the richer and freer work of the etching needle; and the revolution which he inaugurated will never go backward—until such time as the old stage-coach will supplant the express train, and the tallow candle will supersede Mr. Edison's light! Although still in the zenith of his powers M. Flameng has created an epoch in art. He is emphatically a Master, both through his own unsurpassed works and through his famous disciples. He has already won all the honors which artists covet, including the highest prize of all—the great "*Médaille d'honneur*" of the Paris Salon. Of his technical powers, Mr. Hamerton, in *Etching and Etchers*, writes: "He can overcome any difficulty that Rembrandt himself could overcome; and it is not an exaggeration of the truth to affirm that there exists in Europe in our own day a man who may be said to possess the hand and eye of Rembrandt."

Monsieur Flameng has almost completed (in 1890) one of his largest and most im-

portant plates. It is the famous *Chandos* portrait of Shakespeare, which is known to be an authentic portrait painted from life. It is of equal size with the painting, i. e., life size; and represents the poet's head and bust, enclosed in an oval.

Léon Gaucherel died quite recently. He once said, and with as much truth as modesty, "My best works are my pupils." He was especially eminent as a teacher: Rajon, Courtry, Lalauze, Le Rat, and Félix Buhot all learned their art from him. Of these distinguished artists, Félix Buhot is perhaps the least known to the American public; and yet he is, in his way, the most remarkable of them all. Until Buhot had demonstrated the contrary, it was supposed that all the resources of etching had been developed and employed; but it has remained for him to achieve something absolutely new in this much-tried field. His originality of methods is not all, for it is dominated by his originality as a creative artist.

To return to the pioneers of the modern revival, we come to the great names of Jean François Millet and Charles Méryon. Millet painted and etched in poverty which amounted to absolute want. Méryon's case was even worse, for he actually went insane from hunger and neglect, and so died. And now, all too late, the etchings of these two masters are eagerly purchased at prices that to them would have seemed wildly incredible. Of Millet's etched work, an American artist recently remarked: "I like it even better than his painting: when he painted he was thinking of his color; but when he etched he was thinking of his drawing."

Other notable French etchers who took part in the movement were Lalanne, Bracquemond, Appian, Martial, and Jacquemart. Also such famous painter-etchers as Corot, Fortuny, Meissonier, and Detaille. In addition to his own etchings, so full of refinement and grace, the late Maxime Lalanne exerted vast influence through his book on the technical methods of the etcher. It was published in Paris in 1866 (just two years before Mr. Hamerton issued *his* famous book, which was not addressed to the artists but to the public), and was translated into English in 1880 by the accomplished Mr. S. R. Koehler of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Lalanne's treatise still remains the standard text-book on the making of etchings. Valuable aid of another sort was given by the eminent writer Philippe Burty. He was the first to call public attention to the etched work of such masters as Seymour Haden, Méryon, and Millet; and being a critic whose opinion carried with it great authority, his timely recognition of the art was a powerful factor in its material success. Important assistance of still another kind was given by the plate printer Auguste Delâtre. No printer can get a good proof from a bad or inartistic plate; but, *per contra*, an incompetent printer would ruin the result of the finest plate in the world. And it is a fortunate circumstance that the etchers of the past thirty years have had in Delâtre a printer of consummate ability. He is an artist by nature and instinct if not by profession.

It was said of the French by Bulwer Lytton, that they are "great in all the arts, but supreme in none." Be this as it may, it is probable that the two foremost names in modern etching are those of an Englishman, and an American domiciled in England,—namely, Francis Seymour Haden and James McNeill Whistler.

By general consent Seymour Haden ranks as the greatest of modern landscape etchers. How this busy and successful London surgeon took up etching as a pastime, and how with it he has beaten the professional artists on their own ground, is a story too well known to be repeated here. A glance at the accompanying reproduction, in reduced size, of his superb etching of *Shere Mill-pond*, will give a better idea of his work than any verbal description can. It seems almost a pity that Mr. Haden, in his jealous care for the quality of his work, has seen fit to destroy this plate, so as to prevent the possibility of inferior impressions being printed from it in the future. One result is that the proofs

have become excessively rare, and those amateurs who have the good fortune to possess one may have the satisfaction of knowing that its value has fully quadrupled since it was first published.

In reviewing the *Shere Mill-pond*, Mr. Hamerton writes: "A great critic of literature observed to me, that it needed courage to praise without reserve; and there is so little reserve in what I am going to say, that I need this courage now. With the single exception of one plate by Claude, this is the finest etching of a landscape subject that has ever been executed in the world. The plate by Claude, alluded to above, is the one known as the *Bouvier*. Such superiorities as it may have over this plate of Haden's are compensated by other and different superiorities in the English master, and the two etchings may fairly divide our suffrages."

A smaller and less known plate, entitled the *Water Meadow*, deserves special mention. It represents a level English landscape, with trees in the distance. In this etching the wise "labor of omission" is everywhere apparent, and yet none of the essentials of the scene are lacking. The eminent London critic Frederick Wedmore writes of it as "that unsurpassed masterpiece," and the artist's severest critic—namely, himself—has privately written of it in this characteristic way: "I like this plate, which is saying a great deal."

Seymour Haden now declares that his work as an etcher is finished and that he will etch no more. He surely has won laurels to rest on, but yet this resolution on his part is not occasioned by any deterioration of his powers or his strength. He has quit London and has retired to his beautiful old mansion in Hampshire, where the writer recently found him at work, felling with his own hands some of the superfluous timber on the estate, and wielding the axe with a vigor that would have compelled the admiration of Mr. Gladstone himself.

Whistler may be called the etchers' etcher. So competent a judge as Storm van 's Gravesande has said of him, "He is the master of us all." It would probably gratify him, however, to know that to ordinary humanity some of his work is difficult to understand; but the same may be said of such great men as Robert Browning or Franz Liszt. Whistler, though a decided nonconformist in social matters, is, nevertheless, a lion in London society. He loves to befog and mystify the good people of that most conventional capital with his bright and original wit, and it is not easy to know when he is to be taken seriously and when he is only "poking fun." A recent manifesto of his on the subject of etching is so characteristic that we take the liberty of reproducing it; but we beg the reader to bear in mind that it is *Whistler* whom he is reading:

"PROPOSITIONS."

I. "That in Art, it is criminal to go beyond the means used in its exercise."

II. "That the space to be covered should always be in proper relation to the means used for covering it."

III. "That in etching, the means used, or the instrument employed, being the finest possible point, the space to be covered should be small in proportion."

IV. "That all attempts to overstep the limits insisted upon by such proportions are inartistic thoroughly, and tend to reveal the paucity of the means used, instead of concealing the same, as required by Art in its refinement."

V. "That the huge plate, therefore, is an offense; its undertaking an unbecoming display of determination and ignorance; its accomplishment a triumph of unthinking earnestness and uncontrollable energy—endowments of the 'duffer.'"

VI. "That the custom of 'Remarque' emanates from the amateur, and reflects his foolish facility beyond the border of his picture, thus testifying to his unscientific sense of its dignity."

VII. "That it is odious."

VIII. "That, indeed, there should be no margin on the proof to receive such 'Remarque.'"

IX. "That the habit of margin, again, dates from the outsider, and continues with the collector in his unreasoning connoisseurship — taking curious pleasure in the quantity of paper."

X. "That the picture ending where the frame begins, and in the case of the etching the white mount being inevitably, because of its color, the frame, the picture thus extends itself irrelevantly through the margin to the mount."

XI. "That wit of this kind would leave six inches of raw canvas between the painting and its gold frame, to delight the purchaser with the quality of the cloth."

Germany and Italy have contributed comparatively very little to the modern renaissance of etching. Holland (of old the land of etchers *par excellence*) has, in our day, produced in the person of Storm van 's Gravesande one veritable master. His etchings and dry-points deserve the great reputation which they have won, and he is to-day one of the favorites with American connoisseurs. A remarkable feature in his work is the apparent ease and simplicity with which the most beautiful effects are realized. One of our best critics writes, "I find Storm van 's Gravesande the ideal painter-etcher, whose lines are so fused and lost in the perfect whole, that we feel and see what is done, with never a thought for the means whereby it got itself done. It is a comfort to sit down before the work of such an artist as this." One of his recent works — the very large dry-point plate of the Cathedral of Dordrecht — is, in itself, a refutation of the too sweeping assertion of some critics, that any plate of large size must, of necessity, be bad as art.

Another notable Dutch etcher is Philip Zilcken, of The Hague. Being a young man, he is as yet comparatively unknown to fame, but some judges who know whereof they speak (and among them Félix Buhot) have predicted for him a brilliant future.

In activity and success the American school of to-day comes next after the French. The practical directness of the American mind is favorable both to the production and to the popularity of etching, and it is an encouraging fact that the American public manifests a distinct preference for the etchings of our own artists. The limits and scope of the present article have curtailed it in many points, and have rendered it impossible to make detailed mention of the home school; but the subject has been excellently treated in two recent publications, which are here cordially recommended, — namely, "American Etchers," by Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer, and "Etching in America," by Mr. Ripley Hitchcock.

To those who possess Philip Gilbert Hamerton's book, "Etching and Etchers," no word need be said; but to all others who are capable of paying five dollars for a handsome and finely illustrated octavo volume of 450 pages, we would venture to say that if they will buy this book and read it, they will not be sorry. It would be poor praise to call it "as interesting as a novel." It seems impossible that a better book could be written on the subject, both as to matter and style; and it is a veritable treasure-house of sound and tangible ideas on art in general. Having said so much in its praise, it may be noted as singular that Mr. Hamerton omits the name of Fortuny from his roll of honor, and only mentions the name of J. F. Millet in the costly third edition of his book.

A new and important work, now in course of publication in Paris, is *Les Graveurs du XIX^e^ Siècle*, by Henri Beraldi. Nine volumes of it have already appeared, but they do not carry this excellent dictionary of etchers and engravers beyond the thirteenth letter of the alphabet.

Monsieur Beraldi has a method of his own, which is a great innovation upon the style of all former books of reference. He discards dry statistics, such as the measurements of prints and minute records of their various states; but he speaks his own mind freely about the merits of the artists and of their several works, and as he is a man of both knowledge and taste his ideas are valuable.

One noteworthy innovation, which avoids continual verbal repetition, is, that he makes use of three different sorts of type to designate respectively "good,"—"better" and "best" in cataloguing the different works of each artist. Another is his enlivening of his volumes with plenty of bright Gallic wit, which is an agreeable, if an unusual feature in a work of reference.*

"Painter-etching" may be called the shorthand of art. It is the concentrated essence of a picture. In doing apparently little, it suggests a great deal—and in the case of the finest painter-etchings, so replete with suggestion, the beholder himself must mentally do part of the work. The etcher catches and jots down the art idea while it is fresh and living, and he is wise if he stops at that. To toil over and elaborate an idea which is already broadly indicated is fatal to the vividness of the effect, and may be compared to the disheartening operation of explaining joke after the hearer has failed to "see the point."

An etching should appeal to the imagination and should be far more than a mere effigy of the object or scene represented. The personality and the feeling of the artist are its highest qualities, and, if these are lacking, it is not a work of art. Speaking of this slavish imitation of the mere externals, Mr. Whistler once uttered the startling paradox that "nature is seldom right"—and *he* was right, as he meant it.

Should we, then, have no elaborate and painstaking works of art? Certainly we should; but, if the artist possesses that cast of mind, let him sculpture a marble, build an edifice, write a novel, or compose an opera—but let him not etch. Etching, then, is not the species of art to appeal either to the artist or the spectator possessing a lazy mentality. It is essentially an intellectual art, and to intellectual people, etching, like mercy, "blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

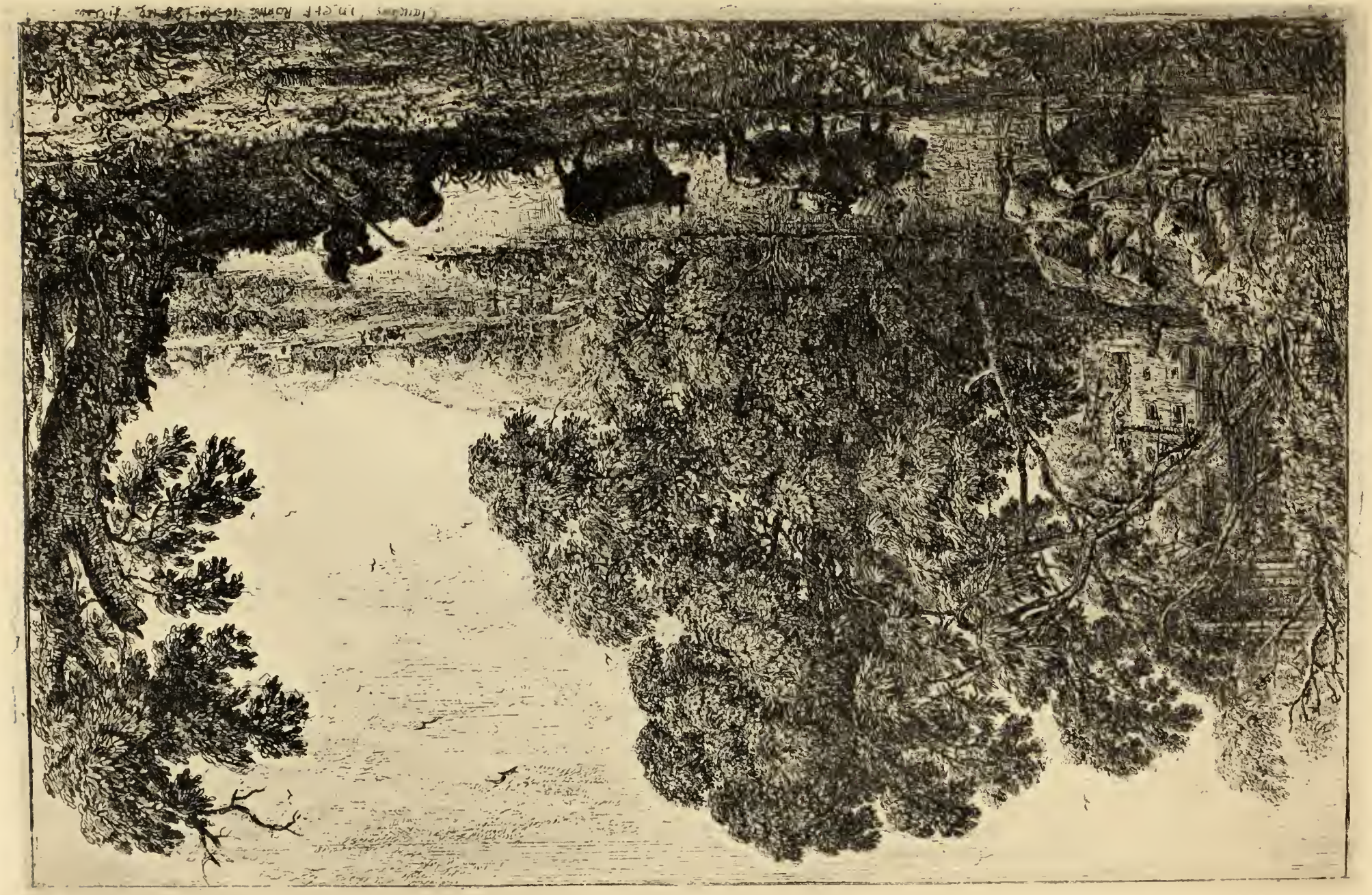
We have not been considering etching as the means of copying or translating the paintings of other men, but original painter-etching, in which the work is done by the creator of the art idea, who in a sense may be called both the father and the mother of the picture.

Contemporary etching fills two distinct functions, which should not be confounded with one another as they too often are.

The first is painter-etching, in which the original creative artist is the engraver of his own picture. The second is reproductive etching, which translates the pictures of other men into the language of black-and-white; light and dark taking the place of color.

This second variety of etching has its place also, and a very important place too. Extreme purists condemn all etching which is not original, but surely this is being too strict. It happens, with very few exceptions, that the greatest painters have also been the greatest etchers; and as painting is vastly more profitable to an artist than etching, it follows that such men cannot really *afford* to etch, for in doing so they must make a serious sacrifice. Such old masters as Claude and Van Dyck, or such moderns as Millet, Meissonier, or Charles Jacque, could doubtless have embodied their finest creations in etching (for they were all etchers), but for the reason just stated they could not afford to do so. Are we, then, to be deprived of the fine prints which have been etched by other hands after their pictures, simply because such etchings are not "original"? Surely not. "Reform" is not a more taking catchword in politics than is "originality" in art. Both are often sadly misused.

*One of Monsieur Beraldi's humorous sallies has fallen on the head of the present writer. On pages 39 and 40 of his eighth volume, he waxes funny over a statement which he professes to find in the second edition of this pamphlet. But as he first mistranslates the sentence and then proceeds to a friendly ridiculing of it (in his own mistranslation)—the writer does not feel at all hurt by this bright and lively Frenchman's attack. Furthermore, his own countrymen are not of M. Beraldi's opinion; for they have since decreed the Medal of Honor of the Paris Universal Exposition to the etcher (Seymour Haden) about whom this little controversy arose.



It is true that the best painter-etchings possess higher qualities than any reproductive work can; but originality alone will not suffice; for there is, alas, no scarcity of mediocre, inferior, and even downright bad "original" etched work. Take, for instance, the case of Léopold Flameng. It is certain that his original plates are distinctly inferior to those in which he has copied the designs of other men. Paul Rajon also, although he has devoted his great abilities to reproductive work, is nevertheless equally strong as an original painter and designer, as his beautiful original portrait of Tennyson abundantly proves.

The uncompromising advocates of originality would probably insist that such a plate as Waltner's *Angelus* should not be called an etching at all—simply because it is not original. But in this case we *do not want* originality from Waltner; Millet gives us that in his painting, and all we should require of Waltner is that he give us a faithful and artistic copy or translation of Millet's design. No doubt Millet himself could have etched it better than any one else; but he never did—and meanwhile we are thankful for Waltner's rendition of that most lovely picture. Now, if the door is to be shut against all reproductive etching, good and bad alike, none but the owner of such a painting as the *Angelus* can enjoy it; the walls of our homes cannot be adorned with the etched reproductions of the best paintings; and etching, now so generally admired, will dwindle down to the contents of the portfolios of a few wealthy amateurs and dilettanti (since so many of the best painter-etchings are really unsuitable for framing by reason of their small size and slight effect when seen from a distance). By all means let the bad and inartistic reproductive etchings go, but let the good remain and multiply. Let not those veritable works of art become like the impossible orchid, a costly thing to amuse half a dozen people out of a million; but rather let them be like the geranium or the morning-glory, whose simple beauty is available to every one.

What are the future prospects of etching considered as a fine art?

The winter of obscurity and neglect is over, and the "glorious summer" of prosperity has come; but herein lies a real danger. With popularity its true artistic side may be ignored; quantity may be considered rather than quality; the art may be "boomed" and exploited for sordid commercial ends, and men who are incapable of it as an art may ply the making of etchings as a trade.

Against this danger there is, however, one sure remedy. Let the public cultivate their judgment and their taste, so that they can choose the good and refuse the bad. No species of art, whether good or bad, can long exist unless supported by those who buy. At no time have there been so many good etchers living and working as there are now. We cannot have too many good etchings, any more than we can have too many good books; and we should see to it that the good etchers—the true artists—are supported and encouraged.

There is no hidden and mysterious quality in a good etching; what to a cultivated eye and mind appears to be right and good *is* good, and what appears to be wrong and bad *is* bad. And if the public will only do its part, the inferior and inartistic will die of neglect, and none but the fittest will survive.

No doubt the years to come will bring with them new tastes and new opinions. Some reputations that now stand high may yet go down, and it may be that the child is now living whose future glory as an etcher will eclipse that of our great men of to-day; but yet we may feel certain that the best works of our modern etchers will go down to posterity as masterpieces—as surely as the works of the great Rembrandt have come down to us.

Frederick Keppel.

WHAT ETCHINGS ARE

What Etchings Are

Introduction

THE following notes were originally written for two young people who love pictures, but who as yet have everything to learn about them. They are therefore addressed to the young, and to any others who may not have already made themselves familiar with the subject. Most of the existing books on Etching very properly assume a certain amount of elementary knowledge on the part of the reader, but the aim of these notes is to begin at the very beginning, seeing that they are addressed, not to those who know, but to those who do not.

There is no surer safeguard toward keeping our children in the right way than by giving them such intellectual resources within themselves as are afforded by refining and ennobling pursuits, such as the love of nature, or of good books, good music, or good pictures.

What an Etching Is

AN etching is an impression printed from an etched metal plate—and not a pen-and-ink drawing, as is sometimes supposed.

Few people, comparatively, have ever examined one of these plates from which etchings are printed, but almost every one has seen the engraved copper-plate which prints a visiting card.

In examining such a card-plate it will be seen that the name it bears is *cut into* the copper. To print a card from this plate a thick oily ink is rubbed into these engraved lines—where it remains while the surface of the copper is wiped clean; a blank card is then laid over the plate, and both are passed through a roller press. The result is that the ink is transferred from the engraved lines in the copper-plate to the cardboard; each card printed requires a separate inking and wiping of the copper-plate.

Now the principle is the same in printing an etching, and when it is once clearly understood how an etching is printed it will be easy to learn how the etched plate, which prints these impressions, is made.

How an Etching is Made

An etched plate is usually of copper (though both steel and zinc are sometimes used). The plate is coated with a sort of varnish composed of wax and other ingredients, and upon this "ground" the artist draws his design with an etching-needle. Each line so drawn displaces the coating or ground, and leaves the copper bare. The plate is then immersed in a preparation of aqua-fortis, and wherever a line has been drawn, the powerful acid corrodes or "bites" a corresponding line or channel into the copper, while at the same time it does not reach those parts of the plate which remain protected by the varnish. It is in this way that aqua-fortis does the actual *engraving* of an etched plate; while in engraving proper, the lines which form the composition are cut into the copper by means of a tool.

When the plate has lain in the "bath" until all the lines of the design have been "bitten in" by the acid, it is taken out, and if it were then cleaned, it could be printed from in the manner already described. By remembering how the card-plate is printed from we will readily understand that the *black parts* of the printed etching will correspond to the lines bitten into the copper, while the *white parts* will correspond to those spaces of the copper surface which have been protected from the acid by the "ground" or varnish.

But our plate is not yet finished; for if a trial proof were now printed it would be seen that all the lines of the composition were of an equal strength, and we know that in any picture the nearest objects must be drawn with the strongest lines, and that the lines must diminish in force to express comparative distances. To effect this, all the lightest lines of the etched plate are filled in, or "stopped out" with the varnish, so that when it is immersed in the bath a second time the acid no longer reaches them, while this second biting adds strength to the other lines. Further "stoppings out" with varnish and "rebitings" with the acid are necessary before the various lines of the plate have their proportionate gradations of force and tone.

What a Dry-Point Is

Although most etchers occasionally produce plates by the dry-point process, yet the two arts are distinct, and the term "a dry-point etching" is a misnomer. The word etching means corrosion (with aqua-fortis), while in dry-point no acid is applied to the plate, but the lines are cut directly into the *dry* copper by means of the *point* or needle. Dry-point is really a sort of freehand engraving, but the result is widely different in effect from the formal exactitude of line engraving. The rich and velvety effect of a dry-point is owing to the "bur," or rough edge of the copper which the "point" throws up as it cuts the plate; this "bur" is purposely left in certain parts of the plate, because as it projects above the surface it can retain more of the ink than any other sort of line, and this rich supply of ink is transferred to the paper in printing. A dry-point will not yield nearly so many good proofs as an etched plate, but the early impressions are very soft and beautiful. Many etched plates are afterward finished and enriched with dry-point.

How Etchings Are Printed

THERE is one radical difference between the printing of etched or engraved plates on the one hand, and the printing of wood-cuts, lithographs, music, and letter-press on the other. This difference is, that in the latter case it is the *surface* which leaves its impression in ink upon the paper, while the case is reversed with engraved or etched plates, for it is the surface which prints white, and the *cut in* lines which print black. To print the pages of a book or the wood-cuts that are inserted with the type, an inked roller is rapidly passed over the surface, and this surface imprints its inked impression on the paper. This is done so rapidly, that a large edition of a book or a newspaper can be printed by machinery in a few hours—and the special value of the wood-cut is that it can be thus printed rapidly and cheaply along with the letter-press.

But when we come to the printing of an etched plate, the conditions are changed. The work which, in the case of the wood-cut or the letter-press, literally "went by steam," now requires great deliberateness and great knowledge, for the printing of etchings is an art, and the man who can print them worthily must himself have the spirit of an artist—just as the man who would perform a composition by Beethoven must himself be a musician.

For this reason, some etchers print their own plates; but very few of them possess the manual skill of a trained printer; and hence, the more usual way is for the artist to superintend and direct the printing of the first trial proofs, and when the printer succeeds in producing one that is entirely satisfactory, this proof is given him to serve as the model which he must follow in printing the remainder of the edition.

The printing of engravings is a mechanical process, in comparison; after the lines are charged with ink, the surface of the plate is wiped quite clean, and that is all. But, with etchings, the infinite variety of effect is partly owing to the manipulation of the printer. To exemplify this, an extreme case may be mentioned: A French etcher—the Count Lepic—recently published a set of etchings, representing, respectively, morning, noon, evening, night, sunshine, rain, fair weather, and storm—and yet all of these proofs were printed from one and the same etched plate! It was simply the variety of treatment in printing that made different pictures of them.

To see an accomplished printer about to print an etching, one would almost think that he was the artist, and that he was then making the picture.

After covering the whole plate with ink, so as to fill the lines, he wipes away the superfluous ink from the surface. In a part of the composition, where the effect should be gloomy and mysterious, he allows a thin film of the ink to remain on the surface of the plate; in another part, where the light should be vivid and brilliant, he wipes away the surface ink until the plate shines; again, where the lines should be soft and rich, instead of harsh and wiry, he draws the ink out of these lines and over their edges by means of a soft muslin rag. At this stage, the whole picture is seen in ink on the copper-plate. Now the supreme moment has come. The printer lays his plate on the platform of a roller-press, and lays the sheet of dampened paper over it; the press is slowly set in motion, and the plate, covered by the sheet of paper, passes under the heavy roller. The pressure transfers the ink from the plate to the paper, and the proof thus printed is carefully removed and set aside to dry, while the printer proceeds to print other proofs in the same manner.

But this "artistic" printing should always be controlled and directed by the artist himself; for it is in the power of the printer to make the result a different thing altogether from what the artist had intended; and the printer should never "take the law into his own hands."

Some eminent etchers insist upon having their plates wiped perfectly clean, so that no shade or tone can appear in the proof that is not already etched into the plate. This does well for minutely etched plates of small size; but a large etching, destined for framing, would certainly look meagre and cold, if printed with the "clean wipe."

What Etchings Are Printed Upon

BOTH the paper and the ink play an important part in the effect of an etching.

Formerly, all were printed with black ink, on white paper. The etchings of Rembrandt and other old masters were so printed, but the mellowing effects of time have undoubtedly improved these old prints, since both the paper and the ink have assumed a harmonious brownish tone, which is much more agreeable to the eye than crude black and white.

For this reason a warm-toned brownish ink is now used, the tone being varied according to the effect desired. Old paper of good quality, is eagerly sought for by the artists; and "many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore" would sell to-day for many times its actual value, if only the "lore" had been omitted, and the pages had remained blank.

As old paper of good quality is becoming more and more difficult to procure, its place is supplied by the next best substitutes.

Japan paper yields beautiful proofs, by reason of its warm, mellow tone and fine surface; but, if Japan proofs are left exposed and unprotected, the surface soon becomes rough and "woolly." It is also impossible to efface anything like a pencil-mark from Japan paper, without leaving an incurable blemish on the surface. Of course, when such proofs are framed, or protected, with "mats," there is no longer any danger of injury to them.

Good substantial Holland paper is probably the best for general use. Its tone is agreeable and its material is strong and durable;—and if (as is very likely) some of our contemporary etchings will be valuable in centuries to come, the amateurs of the future will bless those etchers who have printed their works on honest Holland paper, while they will be tempted to curse those who were so foolish as to print theirs on flimsy and perishable stuff.

What is called India paper (it is really Chinese) is more used for engravings than for etchings. It is a thin, yellowish paper, and is nearly always pasted on to a thick, white backing.

Vellum and parchment—which are prepared calfskin and sheepskin respectively—take very delicate and luminous impressions, and the choicest proofs of many of the finest modern etchings are printed on these materials. Such proofs are very difficult to print and are also difficult to frame properly, but their effect is very beautiful.

Proofs on satin have a good effect in a few cases, but they do not suit every etching.

What "Proofs" Are

THERE is a good deal of confusion in the designation of the various proofs or "states" of a plate, and it should be remembered that there is no fixed and inalterable rule to regulate the order in which different proof-states are issued, or the number of impressions taken in each state.

A proof may be broadly defined as an impression which bears intrinsic evidence that it is one of the earliest (and consequently finest) which the plate has yielded.

We have all heard that "a new broom sweeps clean"—similarly, a new plate *prints* clean and prints well. Every impression taken wears out the plate somewhat, and therefore a worn plate can only yield inferior impressions.

The term "proof" retains its original meaning when applied to the experimental impression which a letter-press printer takes when he has set up his type, and which he submits to the writer for correction.

Two centuries ago, an engraved plate was not supposed to be finished or ready for publication until after the title, the artist's name, and other lettering had been engraved into the lower margin. But it often happened that the artist—after he had finished the pictorial part of his plate, but before he had added these inscriptions—took a "proof" to satisfy himself that his work thus far was perfect. Such an impression would be without any lettering; that is, a veritable "proof before letters." The connoisseurs of those days knew quite well that an early impression was best, and when they found one of these experimental proofs lacking the title, they knew it *must* be a very early one, and they valued it accordingly.*

The artists, seeing this, took the hint and printed several such impressions before they added the lettering to their plates—and from this beginning the whole modern system of proofs has grown.

This evolution took the following course:

First. A few impressions were printed without any lettering whatever; these were called the "artist's proofs."

Secondly. The names of the painter and engraver were added, in small letters; this second grade was called the "proofs before letters"—that is, before the title.

Thirdly. The title was added in outline only, and the "open-letter" proofs were taken.

Fourthly. The outline letters of the title were filled in, any further lettering or inscription was added, and in this final state the bulk of the edition was issued, and these impressions were called the "lettered prints."†

During all these additions and alterations the plate was gradually wearing out from use, the early proofs were few in number and fine in quality, and in consequence they sold for much higher prices than the lettered prints.

Two other modern refinements are the "Remarque" proof and the *signed* artist's proof. The French term *une épreuve de remarque* is simple and intelligible, and any Frenchman will know that it means a proof bearing a special mark; but in English the term becomes unmeaning, for the reason that our word "remark" is not a translation of the French term—and it is much to be desired that some more intelligible English word could be substituted.

The "remarque" proof, like proofs in general, had a sort of accidental origin. While a plate was in progress the artist sometimes amused himself—or tried the condition of his etching-needle—by scrawling some little sketch on the blank margin of the plate. It was easy to burnish out this sketch before the formal printing of the plate had begun, but occasionally an early proof was taken beforehand. This was a veritable "remarque" proof, and the informal sketching in the margin was evidence of its earliness.

In the case of some line engravings, the remarque is indicated—not by adding a sketch, but by leaving some trifling detail of the composition unfinished.

* In April, 1887, at the sale of the Duke of Buccleuch's collection in London, such a proof of Rembrandt's etched portrait of Uytenbogaert brought the enormous price of $6200.

† It should be explained that, in tracing the origin of proofs in general, a digression has been made from the subject of Etchings to that of Engravings. The old system of "open-letter proofs," etc., no longer obtains in the case of modern etchings; and, in fact, many etched plates *have* no blank margin upon which a title could be engraved. Information as to the relative grades of such etchings will be found under the heading, "What the 'States' of an Etching are."

According to modern usage, the "remarque" proof indicates the very choicest condition of the plate and takes precedence of the artist's proof; so that the best possible state of a contemporary etching would be a "remarque" proof, printed probably on vellum and signed by the etcher (or by both painter and etcher, if the plate were etched from a picture by another contemporary artist). After a limited number of such proofs are printed, the "remarque" is effaced from the copper-plate, and then the artist's proofs are taken.

Some distinguished etchers are intolerant of the "remarque," and insist that it is an interruption to the unity of the main composition. In the etched work of Seymour Haden, for instance, no such thing is to be found.

But a more valuable evidence of high quality than the "remarque" is the autograph of the artist written on the lower margin of an etching. The etcher, above all others, should be the judge *par excellence* of quality, and no conscientious artist will affix his signature to a proof unless that proof is all that it should be. The artist's signature may thus be compared to the endorsement by a solvent man of a promissory note. Occasionally, when an etching is done from a painting by another artist, both the painter and the etcher will formally guarantee the quality of a few selected proofs, by adding their respective signatures.

What "States" of an Etching Are

"STATES" and "proofs" signify about the same thing; but the former term is usually applied to the works of artists who etch their own designs, instead of etching copies of pictures done by other men.

Thus, we never hear of an "artist's proof" etched by Rembrandt, or Van Dyck, or Whistler,—but of a "first state," "second state," etc.

Here, again, terms are sometimes misleading; for it must not be supposed that the first state of a painter-etching is invariably the best—though it certainly is the earliest. In many cases, such a first state is no more than a meagre and unfinished outline of the intended composition.

What is most desirable is the first *finished* state—although (as in the case of Rembrandt) an impression in the earliest finished condition might figure in the books of reference as a third or fourth state.

A very simple and reasonable method of classification has been adopted in Sir William Drake's *Catalogue of the Etched Work of Seymour Haden.* In this excellent book, the first experimental impressions from an unfinished plate (taken by the artist for his own guidance) are designated—not as "first state," but as "*trial proof A.*" When the work in the plate is carried farther, so that a second experimental printing is necessary, these second proofs are catalogued as "*trial proof B,*"—and so on, until the plate is finished. Then an edition is printed for publication, and this first *finished* state is very properly designated as the "First State." Later on, if any further additions or alterations are made, all subsequent proofs would be catalogued as "second state." *

The number of proofs taken varies so greatly with different plates, that it is impossible to lay down any general rule on the subject. In some cases, not more than thirty

* It may interest connoisseurs to note, that, contrary to the general usage, Seymour Haden has almost invariably produced his second or third states—not by adding something to his plate, but by *taking something out.* Thus, in the case of his renowned *Shere Mill-pond*, the lines which appear in the sky of the first state are all taken out in the second; and all good judges must agree with Mr. Haden, that this alteration has added greatly to the beauty of the plate.

"remarque" proofs are printed, but in others more than twice that number. A strongly etched plate will yield a greater number of good proofs than one in which the lines are fine and delicate. Also, the recently discovered method of "steel-facing" a copper-plate materially increases its lasting powers. This "steel-facing" is an electroplating process, which lays an extremely thin film of steel over the etched plate.

Sometimes an artist will make his etching artificially rare by destroying his plate after printing a very few impressions; but, in any case, there is a limit to the number of really good proofs which any plate will yield—and, provided that the etching is a fine work of art, these proofs are almost certain to increase in value, in proportion as they become scarce and difficult to procure. For this reason, a collection of etchings, intelligently purchased, may be regarded rather as a safe investment than as a mere fruitless outlay.

No one can fully appreciate or enjoy what he does not understand; and, when once etchings are thoroughly understood from the technical side, their further study from the artistic point of view will be found both easy and delightful.

Good etchings are veritable works of art; they are accessible to all, and their value is permanent;—and if these rudimentary notes should lead some readers to study the subject in its higher aspects, the writer will feel that he has contributed something toward adding a new and very real pleasure to their lives.

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